

Welcome Me To Your Home

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Welcome Me To Your Home

by [fictionalfaerie](#)

Summary

Season two, daemon style. Kind of.

Will may have figured out Hannibal's secret, but he's not quite figured out what to do about it. It'd be a lot easier to figure out if he wasn't so attached, and if he and his daemon could just catch a break, just a few minutes to themselves.

Notes

Whoosh. Here it is, two years after the first one- the sequel to "You've Begun To Feel Like Home", the daemon monstrosity that ate my soul.

Ideally, this is to be read following that one- in my head, it's set a few weeks afterward. However, I've done my best to make this readable on it's own. The main things you need to know are that this world has daemons (if you don't know about daemons, a quick Google should bring you a wealth of information- but the short of it is that everyone's soul has a physical animal representation) and Will has not only realized he's remarkably attached to Hannibal, but also that Hannibal is the Chesapeake Ripper that Jack's so obsessed with.

This follows some of season two's events- some of the storylines from the show got cut, but I wrote a great deal of those, so expect shoot-offs in the snippet doc I have going on at some point~! WARNING --- As such, this fic deals with a lot of uncomfortable stuff because Mason is a giant horrific, terrifying, worst-person-ever creepwad. Like, forreal. I've used a lot of his book background, and that Mason was fond of trying to creep people out by talking about how he was abusive to animals and children. I have tried really, really hard not to go into detail on this and yet still mention them. If you want more information about what's included and if it will be too much for you, please feel free to contact me and I'll walk you through what I've done OR send you a version without those bits.

If you feel I've undersold something, then I'm so incredibly sorry and also horrified and will happily come modify these notes to be more of a red flag. Just let me know.

A huge thanks to Kasumizuki on Tumblr for the fantastic piece she did to accompany this! I'm absolutely in love with it, y'all. Make sure you check it out in the second chapter here, and leave her all of the love. Also, so many thanks to the mod over at NBCHannibalBigBang on Tumblr for tossing this thing together and hosting it.

Also, the world's biggest thanks and all of the hearts go out to my Nikki and my Emily. Without them, this piece wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have signed up, I would have given up a million times over, I never would have made it through. I've screamed and flailed and cried and badgered them so much over this fic, it's a miracle they still seem to like me.

So, yeah. Long author's note is long, but here you go- the second part in my Daemon trilogy, written with lots of love and lots of frustrated screaming. I hope you enjoy~
Title taken from "Midnight Land" by Empires.

Welcome Me To Your Home

Will pushes open the door to the restaurant and steps inside. As it thunks shut behind him, the noises from everyone outside die down.

Inside, it is dark. It is quiet. It is waiting for his design. He turns his head to the side, looking down at the company he has brought with him. Soon. The restaurant has been closed for a couple of hours now, but he can still smell the garlic in the air. He can almost taste the marinara. That this would be the place... he can feel the rage bubbling in his throat, fighting alongside the bile as he thinks about them, sitting in that booth. His daemon snarls, and together he and the Capuchin turn back to their company.

He's caught up for a moment as he turns, though, breathless at the sight of Hannibal, leaning against the kitchen counter and smiling at him. He holds a glass of wine out, raising an eyebrow, and Will can't help it. He's pulled toward him through some invisible force, like magnets.

Velia laughs lightly, chastising Hannibal, warning him that he's going to get Will drunk if he isn't careful. Hannibal's reply is another raised eyebrow, this one aimed at his leopard. She laughs as he pours a bit more wine into the glass before handing it over to Will.

As Will turns his face away to laugh at himself, something catches his eye. It's her, crumpled on the dirty restaurant floor. Her dress is ripped, right along the sleeve. Such a shame. He always liked that dress. As he lifts her and slides her into the booth, he carefully pats at the rip until it looks almost as good as new, carefully resting against itself. His Capuchin slides her rabbit onto the table beside her hands. Next comes *him*.

He's not as careful with him, shoving him angrily into the other side of the booth. He's heavier than she is, and the man starts to wake up as he moves him. There's a brief struggle, but he gets the upper hand and manages to knock him out again using a nearby chair. The Capuchin has no issues with his rabbit. And isn't that just sweet of them? Matching daemons. He wants to rip them apart, but he can't. Not yet.

Once they are all in the booth, slumped and facing each other, Will sits back, resting on the floor and breathing heavily. He lifts a hand up to grab onto a table to pull himself up.

Hannibal catches his hand, though, twirling him lightly. Brina cracks up from her place next to Velia, and Will's almost positive he hears her laughing about the last time he danced. God, the last time he danced... it had to have been years ago. Maybe college? Probably. He took that horrible class where she made them dance... He doesn't have time to dwell on it, though, because Hannibal is pulling him against his chest. He smiles, despite himself, and lets himself lean into Hannibal for a moment.

When he pulls away, his hand hits the knife on the counter, knocking it to the floor. He bends to pick it up, and when he stands--- when he stands, he looks down at the blood all over his hands. Their blood. Satisfaction shivers its way through him, and he leans down to carve his way into them.

This will teach her. This will teach her that she is his and he is hers and they are each other's and this man, this pathetic man she's chosen over him? He is nothing. The Capuchin begins to screech,

jumping a bit on the table behind him, and he turns to grin at her, but finds himself facing blurry numbers on a clock face. 5:17 AM. Who the hell calls at 5:17 AM? Well, okay, that's a dumb question. He grabs the phone to answer Jack's call, getting up and leaving Brina to curl against Hannibal and grumble with him about the unexpected wake up.

"We've got to go," Will tells Brina with a sigh, hanging up.

"What?" She asks, "Why do we have to go?" Her nails click loudly against the restaurant tiles as she comes up to him.

He startles, jumping a bit and blinking as things come into focus. He's standing beside the booth where the four bodies are. The humans are propped up, flowers flowing out of their mouths and peeking out of holes carved into their shirts where the killer took their hearts. Their daemons, both rabbits, have been positioned to mimic a heart shape on the table between them.

He looks from them to Brina to the door, trying not to let the confusion morph into fear. He's not sure how he got here. He's not sure how long he's been here. His head hurts and he wants to be anywhere but in this restaurant, looking at these bodies.

"I've just got to get out of here. Outside," Will answers, just as he can tell that she's getting antsy. She follows him to the door, asking him if he's okay. He ignores her, though, instead shoving his way out of the restaurant. The fresh air and sunshine hit him hard, and he almost doubles over as the headache slams him alongside them. He only gets a moment before Jack's coming over to him.

"Well, Will, am I right?" he's asking, walking right up into Will's space.

Will looks at him for a moment, trying to figure out what he's talking about. "Are you right, about...?"

"Is it *him*, Will? The Ripper?" Jack's voice echoes in his head, rattling around in his brain and chasing away those images of Hannibal smiling at him. They start fading, morphing into others. Hannibal's almost gentle graze turns harsh and judgmental, his smile takes on a wicked edge, and when the Hannibal in his vision holds his hand out, the wine glass has been replaced with a human heart. Will squeezes his hand into a fist, clenching his hand tightly, letting his fingernails dig into his palm. This is too much. This is too much. This is-

"Will, come on. Get with us here, is it him?"

Brina snorts in response, and Will shoots her a warning look as he answers, "Definitely not the Ripper. Too... inelegant? Definitely not his style."

"Inelegant?" Price asks, wandering over with Zeller. His daemon clicks at him a bit, and he nods, continuing, "He ripped their hearts out and put flowers in their places..."

"There's definitely some flower language going on in there, too," Zeller adds.

"Flower language?" Jack asks, turning to them.

Zeller nods, "Yeah, you know? Like, that whole symbolism thing that they had going on? Yellow roses for mourning and---"

“Oh, come on, yellow roses for mourning? Yellow roses were a sign of affection, you idiot. Willows were for mourning.”

“Why do you two know this?” Jack asks as his Shepherd growls her discontent.

Zeller’s cat fluffs up a bit at that, jumping up to land on his shoulder and glare down at the beast of a dog. She’s always uncomfortable around Jack’s German Shepherd, and she’s always uncomfortable around Brina. When the coyote and the Shepherd are together, she can barely stand it. Zeller holds a hand up to her, letting her rub her face against it to calm herself down while he contemplates his answer.

“...it’s just, you know, one of those things you pick up?” Price offers up with a shrug. “Seems like the kind of thing the Ripper would be into.”

“I don’t know. A bit obvious for him,” Zeller replies.

“Too obvious? Too obvious?!” Price whirls to glare at Zeller.

He lets them banter for a bit, trying to breathe through the nausea that’s hitting him now. He’s not sure if this is something the Ripper would find too obvious or not, but he knows that this can’t be the work of the Ripper. After all, Hannibal was getting him drunk and feeding him some overly fancy duck dish when this guy killed his victims. He presses his hand against his face, rubs his eyes just this side of too hard. Why did he ever think this would work? Why did he ever think that he could find some way to balance all of this shit? How did this become his life?

Will interrupts. “The knife work is clumsy. This is someone who might be used to cutting meat, but he’s not used to butchering it himself. It’s jagged and ugly and the work of a novice. Tell the locals they’re more than likely looking for a first timer.”

“Will, are you su-”

“Yes. Jack. I’m sure. This isn’t Ha- this isn’t handled how he would handle one of his scenes. It’s clumsy and rushed. Whoever this was he was angry and he was scared. Probably a little heartbroken, too. Get someone on those flowers, figure out what they mean. I’ve got to go take something for this headache.”

Jack keeps talking, Zeller and Price hemming and hawing about the scene, but Will waves a hand dismissively, walking away and ignoring it. He’s got to get away from them.

He heads over to his car, pulling open the door and collapsing into the seat. He rests his head against the steering wheel as Brina jumps over him and settles into the passenger seat. She pushes the bottle of headache pills toward him.

“Thanks,” he says, blindly grabbing for it and popping it open.

“Of course,” she says, resting her head against his leg. He drops a hand to rub along the coarse fur of her neck, relishing her company. He’s not sure what he would do without her. She hums a bit, pressing herself more firmly against him and letting him take a few moments to reorganize his thoughts.

“Will? Will, are you sure you are feeling well?”

Will jerks, his fork dropping loudly. He can feel it as his heart starts racing, can feel his breaths start to speed up, can see the room starting to blur out as his vision tunnels. Before he can form a response, he feels Hannibal’s hands framing his face, tilting his head toward him. It’s all a blur and his chest hurts, he can’t, he can’t, he can’t, he can’t-

One of Hannibal’s hands moves to cover his eyes, “Can you breathe with me, Will? Match your breaths with mine, please.”

He focuses for a few seconds, a few minutes, a few hours, and feels his chest start to loosen as he manages to time his breaths with Hannibal’s steady breathing.

“Better?” Hannibal’s voice asks, and Will takes a moment to lean into that hand slightly, keeping his eyes pressed together tightly. He risks a nod and is relieved when the world doesn’t upend itself as he does.

“What’s, uh. What’s going on?” Will manages, voice hoarse and scratchy.

“Where’re we?” he hears Brina slur, and he turns his head away from Hannibal, opening his eyes to check in on her. She’s leaned heavily against Velia, panting visibly. Velia is humming, rubbing her head against the top of Brina’s.

“You are in my home,” Hannibal responds, addressing Brina. “Do you remember how you came to be here? Will? Brina?”

Will shakes his head lightly, sees Brina doing the same, and Hannibal nods, sliding his hand up to Will’s forehead. “I thought perhaps as much. You arrived here at four thirty, having driven yourself. Do you remember that?”

When Will shakes his head again, Hannibal hums to himself slightly, and then continues, “We spoke a bit about a crime scene you visited earlier with Jack, and then we prepared dinner together. Do you remember that?”

Will almost shakes his head again, feeling frustrated, but then shrugs instead. He might remember that. He remembers the scene, remembers wine, remembers... did he slice some carrots? He glances at the table. There aren’t any carrots. Maybe a different course...

Hannibal clicks his tongue lightly, and tilts his head to the side so that they make eye contact, “Verbally, please.”

“I... “ Will feels his voice stutter out, sighs, forces it to cooperate, “I remember the scene. Not... the rest. Were there carrots?”

Hannibal shakes his head, pursing his lips a bit before continuing, “There were no carrots. Do you remember anything of our dinner, Will? Our discussion?”

“I don’t. I remember... Zeller and Price were arguing specifics about the plants, but I had a headache, and Brina told me to sit down, so we did. That’s... that’s all I did, that’s- I sat down, and then I was here.”

Brina lets out a whine, and Velia curls her tail around her possessively.

At Hannibal's frown, Will asks, "What was I... was I doing something weird, or...?"

"Not at all. The conversation has been a bit forced, but I attributed that to the stress of your day. In fact, had you not lapsed in the midst of a sentence, I would not have noticed anything was amiss."

Brina jumps up, pacing the room a bit. She catches his eye, and tilts her head toward the door. He nods at her. "I think Brina and I should head home. I've got a lot I should do, and I've been gone all day, the dogs are probably anxious for us to get home. I'm sorry I bothered you, Hannibal, Velia."

As he goes to stand, Hannibal rises from where he'd been crouching next to Will, putting a hand on Will's shoulder to stop him, "I would really rather you not leave, Will."

"Why?" Brina asks, voice snappy and sharp. She rises from her spot, fur starting to bristle.

Hannibal doesn't seem phased by it, however, probably because it's the same tone of voice she's used on everyone aside from Will and Velia for the past few weeks. As he opens his mouth to answer, Velia interrupts, answering for him, "You two shouldn't be alone if you're this ill, Brina. Whatever is happening to Will is happening to you, too. You've been just as distant as he has this evening."

Brina droops a bit at that, backing up a few steps and glancing at Will.

He finally shakes his head, "No, I need to go home. The dogs need me. I want to be in my own bed. I don't want to--"

He cuts himself off, stepping away from the table. He can feel his chest tightening. He needs to be at home.

"You are no bother to us, Will Graham," Velia responds, tail flicking loudly against the floor. He can hear the ticking of the clock in Hannibal's foyer. He can feel his veins pulsing.

"Will," Hannibal says quietly, stepping into his line of sight. Will wasn't even aware that his vision was tunneling, not until Hannibal stepped into it. "Would you allow Velia and I to accompany you two home, if you insist on leaving? We would both feel more comfortable knowing that you are safe and have someone watching over you."

Will doesn't answer, can feel himself swaying on his feet. He thinks maybe he's about to pass out. He thinks maybe he's already passed out. He thinks. He thinks. He thinks.

He hears Brina answer for him, "Fine, whatever, whatever, let's just go. I want to go home."

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When they were ten, Brina and Will caught a nasty strain of the flu, right at the tail end of flu season. It stuck with them for a week and a half before leading into a case of pneumonia that the local doctor kept referring to as the worst he'd ever seen. They hadn't been as impressed as he had been. The two had spent four and a half weeks curled up together with that pneumonia, shivering their way through the sweltering Louisiana summer while Will's dad picked up extra shifts to cover the expense of their medicines.

She can't help but think back to those days, lately.

There have been so many nights where she's woken up, shivering and panting, overheated even while she feels like she might freeze to death. Too many days end with them dropping exhaustedly into bed and curling into each other.

As she curls up against Will's back, panting, she can remember those days all too clearly. She thinks they should probably ask for help, go to a doctor, mention this to anyone... but she can't bring herself to do it. She's tried to speak up. She's started to tell Velia so many times now. Every time she starts to, though, she remembers that doctor and how fascinated he'd been by them, how he'd hemmed and hawed over them and wasted so much time trying to decide if her being settled was making things worse, how he'd asked them questions that made them feel like maybe it was their fault they'd gotten sick. When she hears his voice, her words stick to the roof of her mouth and she knows she can't let this secret out.

So she doesn't say anything to anyone. She just curls herself around Will and tries not to think about all those hours they don't remember, all those conversations that have blurred together, all those things they're seeing and hearing and feeling that she's pretty sure aren't really there... She just curls herself around Will and tries not to think.

They'll make it through this. They will make it through this. They *will* make it through this.

That's just what they do.

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It takes far longer than Hannibal feels it should to get Will settled in bed.

The drive to his house had been unnerving and seemed to stretch on and take far longer than it should have taken. Will had leaned against the door completely unresponsive as they drove. Brina had sprawled in the backseat against Velia and convulsed against her on and off for the duration of the drive. He'd know that they were in the midst of some sort of fugue state when they'd shown up at the house earlier, but he'd had no clue just how intense the episode was until Will woke up briefly at the table, so to speak. Perhaps he hadn't even known until he got them in the car.

When they'd pulled into the house, Will had stumbled out and toward the door, only seeming to come to life when the dogs swarmed his legs. Between him and Hannibal, they'd managed to get the dogs fed and walked in a relatively short span of time, thankfully.

After the last dog is in and accounted for, Hannibal turns to Will, giving into his desire to order him around, "Bed, Will."

Will just nods and moves toward the bedroom on autopilot. Velia has already nudged Brina into the bedroom, is already working on getting her up onto the bed. Hannibal helps Will shed his clothing. He watches him fall into bed inelegantly, Brina crawling to him and shivering against him.

Once he's seen to it that Will is settled, Hannibal lets his attention wander. He knows he won't be heading home tonight, so he goes about making himself comfortable.

He takes his time familiarizing himself with the place again. The fridge is a mess, so he cleans out the dismal contents. He puts away some dishes, listening to Velia fussing with the dogs who are always fascinated with her. Eventually, he moves to the living room and examines Will's

bookshelves. They seem to be a disaster, and if Will employs any sort of organizational system it's impossible to discern.

He returns to the kitchen and pours himself some of Will's whiskey. At Winston's insistence, Hannibal opens the door and lets the dogs outside again. He takes his whiskey and step outside with them, making himself comfortable on one of the chairs on Will's porch.

Velia swats at Buster, chasing him off the porch, and collapses happily along the edge of the steps.

She gives Hannibal a few moments of silence before she speaks. "What was all of that, Hannibal?"

He hesitates, but finally answers, "I'm not certain."

"You may not be certain," Velia says, "but I'm certain that you have at least a theory."

He narrows his eyes at her, watching as her tail flicks. He contemplates the whiskey, swirling it in it's glass before setting it down.

"They're ill."

"Hannibal." Velia's voice is flat and unimpressed as she calls him on his stalling technique. "Obviously. We've known that for a while now."

He allows himself a brief flicker of annoyance at her, then frowns as he answers. "It's likely encephalitis."

She turns that over for a bit, and he gives her time. He takes a sip of his whiskey, whistles at one of the dogs that's straying away from the pack. She finally responds to his diagnosis. "Encephalitis would explain a lot. The headaches, the hallucinations, the time loss... how long, do you suppose?"

"Perhaps as long as we have known them."

Velia startles a bit, "That long?"

"We've known that they were different since we met them. How many of those unique quirks could be written off as symptoms, do you think?"

"They have both been very irritable since the beginning."

They both chuckle a bit at that. Irritable seems a bit charitable of a phrase to apply to Will and Brina. He's quite certain that if anyone had even implied that the brash man and rude coyote taking turns growling at him in Jack's office back then would one day be so dear to he and Velia, they would have thought them crazy. To think that the pair they met in that office that day would figure out him out, would keep his secret? Unimaginable.

And yet, here he sits on their porch, trying to figure out what to do about their illness rather than trying to figure out how best to dispose of them.

"Shall we take them to a doctor tomorrow?" Velia asks, jarring him from his thoughts.

And there. There is the question of the hour. Now that he's admitted what he knows, to both himself and Velia, what does he do about it? He finishes the whiskey off instead of answering her.

“Hannibal,” Velia says, voice demanding an answer to her question.

“I’m not entirely certain, Velia,” he answers, allowing himself the moment of honesty, of vulnerability.

She lets out a low growl at the answer, so he continues, “We’ve suggested that they may be ill a couple of time, Velia. They avoid the subject each time. They’ve made their opinions of doctors remarkably clear from the very beginning. If we were to suggest that they are ill enough to need a doctor? I fear that we ourselves may lose their trust. Surely, Velia, I don’t need to explain to you why that would be a bad thing.”

She scoffs out loud, “I hardly see how a mere suggestion would lose their trust.”

“Velia,” he sighs, “their symptoms are too obvious. As soon as it’s diagnosed, it will be obvious that I’ve known.”

Velia stands up and paces angrily at that, “That is the flimsiest excuse I have ever heard from you, Hannibal Lecter, and I’ve know you your entire life. What is your real reasoning?”

He lets her question sit unanswered as he tries to hold back the spike of anger. No good ever comes from fighting with Velia. He takes a few steadying breaths.

“You’re right,” he says eventually, making sure that she can hear his sarcasm, “We should immediately endeavor to help both of them find their way to clear and healthy minds, to regain a normal mindset and sense of the world.”

She waits a beat before responding, “You’re scared. That’s why you haven’t done anything? Because you think their being ill is the only reason they’re accepting... *us*?”

“Aren’t you?” He can’t even look at her, afraid of what judgment she might wear on her face.

“Well, now I certainly am.”

They sit in silence for a few moments before she finally asks, “What do we do, Hannibal?”

Three days later, Hannibal and Velia are no closer to a resolution. It’s been weighing on them heavily, so he lets the topic come to the forefront of his thoughts as they meet with Bedelia.

She sits across from him as he gathers his thoughts, watching him with an almost clinical detachment that he’s always admired.

“I have been considering, recently, the rules we must adhere to,” he says, allowing himself to take comfort in the feel of Velia’s tail against his ankle.

She raises an eyebrow, “Rules we adhere to as...? Doctors? Humans?”

“Perhaps both.”

She nods, running a finger along Bryant’s head. The mink closes his eyes, tilting his head. Hannibal can feel Velia’s desire to eat the small beast. It courses pleasantly through him, and he lets that violence embolden him, bolster him with confidence.

“We’ve recently found ourselves in an odd position,” he continues, inclining his head ever so slightly toward Velia. “We find ourselves unsure of what course of action to take in regards to... a patient.”

“Will Graham,” she says, nodding. He allows himself to narrow his eyes at her, and she continues, “Hannibal. In the time since the two of you met, you’ve spoken about him quite often. Before meeting him, you rarely spoke of patients. It’s not hard to put the pieces together.”

He considers denying it, but Velia catches his eye and shakes her head. She’s right, Bedelia would never be fooled by a simple denial. So, he continues.

“Yes. Will Graham. I find myself in an odd position with him. As a friend, as a doctor even, I find myself wanting to push him toward seeking a medical professional to see to some issues that have been bothering him. However, as a friend, and as a doctor even, I find myself reluctant.”

“What causes this reluctance, Hannibal?”

“A multitude of things. As a friend, Will isn’t fond of doctors, and I fear he would take the suggestion poorly. As a doctor, I must admit that it is my pride. Recommending him to another, it would almost be the same as giving up, would it not?”

Hannibal watches Bedelia’s face and cannot help the spike of admiration he feels in regards to her ability to remain completely composed. She gives absolutely nothing away. Once upon a time, Hannibal wouldn’t have noticed, would have thought it subpar compared to his own composure. Will, however, has ruined that ability.

He continues, “And yet, if I don’t tell him that I am worried for his health, I fear that I fail him as both a doctor and a friend.”

“I think, Hannibal, that you are hoping I will tell you what to do in this situation.”

When he doesn’t reply, she continues, “We both know that I will do no such thing, Hannibal. You need to come to a decision on your own.”

“You cannot bring yourself to offer me any advice?”

She shakes her head at him, and glances at the clock. “The only advice I can give you, Hannibal, is that you need to do what is best for you. We can only hope that aligns with what is best for Will Graham.”

Before he can open his mouth to argue, she cuts him off, standing and moving away, “I’m afraid I must adhere strictly to our schedule today, Hannibal. I’ve got another appointment after this one.”

“Another appointment?” He furrows his brow, “Are you cheating on me, Bedelia?”

She gives him a half smile and shakes her head, “I would never, Hannibal. This is nothing like that. However, I must end this conversation here. I trust we’ll pick it up next time?”

“Of course, Bedelia.” He walks toward her, capturing her hand and kissing it lightly. He nods to Bryant, who doesn’t acknowledge him, and he and Velia take their leave.

Hannibal is careful to cover his tracks, taking great care in going out of his routine, snuffing out the lives in front of him in ways he would normally never dare to do. He makes Velia wait outside, careful that she leaves no prints. The man's gun is easy to get to and easy to use against both the man and his wife. Their daemons' necks snap so easily that there's almost no satisfaction behind it. He works at being messy with his knife work, carving out the organs he's chosen with absolutely no finesse. He even goes so far as to go back in and hack around sloppily to destroy his clean cuts. He tears out more than he wants, leaving bits and pieces strewn around.

When he's certain that there's no way they'll call Will into ponder over whether or not this is his work, he goes outside to rejoin Velia.

"Do you feel better now?" she asks.

He doesn't bother responding until they're in the car.

"Not even remotely."

She nods at that, obviously unsurprised, and settles into the seat as he starts the car. The ride home is silent, and he's thankful that she doesn't say the things he knows are on the tip of her tongue. He's in no mood for her lectures.

Two, three hours pass in silence. It isn't until he turns onto their street that she finally speaks up.

"We can't keep on like this, Hannibal."

His hands tighten around the steering wheel, and he waits until the car is parked to answer.

"You're right."

"So, what are we going to do, Hannibal?"

"No, Velia. You're right. About it all. We cannot keep on like this; we need to tell them."

He watches from the corner of his eye as she straightens for a second, then droops.

"I think this is perhaps the first time I had hoped I was wrong."

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In the entirety of their lives, Velia can only recall four significant disagreements between she and Hannibal. Each of those disagreements led to significant life changes.

The first disagreement led to what was likely their survival, both small and scared and angry at everything including each other. They've both made their peace with the other on the subject, acknowledging the truth of the situation and the ways in which they should have compromised.

Their second argument resulted in the loss of the Lady Murasaki, and still burns bitterly if brought up. The last time it was mentioned, the two didn't speak to each other for eight days.

The third instance had to do with Hannibal's change in occupation. Velia reluctantly admits that moving on to psychiatry was a smart decision and has likely kept them out of jail for this long.

When she admitted as much, the subject was dropped and has never been broached again.

This fourth disagreement has been weighing heavily on both of them. She's knows that they both hate arguing, that their past arguments rise to the forefront of both of their thoughts when they do get into it. And yet, despite this, the two have been unable to agree on the matter.

Until tonight.

She wonders why it is that this victory feels so pyrrhic to her.

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Will rolls his head, surprised when it thumps against something. He turns and blinks in confusion when he sees the back of one of Hannibal's chairs.

Then he remembers. He's in Hannibal's office, waiting on Hannibal to finish up some paperwork at his desk. Brina is snoring lightly on the cushion across the way. Velia is stretched out on the balcony above them. He glances at his watch and nods.

He must have dozed off, is all. It's been eight minutes. Two more before he can start teasing Hannibal for an incorrect prediction about how long it would take him to finish his work. Two minutes. He can focus for that long. He focuses on the seconds as they pass.

At fifteen seconds, Hannibal glances up and graces him with a smile. At thirty seconds, Brina startles awake from a dream, locking eyes with him and visibly relaxing.

At fifty seven seconds, the door slams open and Jack comes charging in. He's leading a SWAT team in, everyone's yelling, Will's chest is tightening up and he can't breathe. Things aren't supposed to go like this. They're supposed to head to Will's after this, they're supposed to walk the dogs together. Hannibal wanted Will to teach him fly making tonight. This isn't supposed to happen.

He flinches as Velia jumps down, landing on a daemon and ripping. She looks up at him, covered in blood, eyes full of betrayal and accusations, and all he can do is stare. Jack grabs his arm and tries to push him aside and Brina lunges, latching onto Jack's arm. In their struggle, his gun goes off, and Will feels the whole room hit slow motion.

Hannibal's taken two of the SWAT members out and Will watches, fascinated, as they fall to the ground, inch by inch, second by second, so slowly that it doesn't seem real. Will's heart is beating double time, speeding up for every moment that slows down. He can barely breathe, and as he catches Hannibal's eye, he sees Jack's bullet. He watches the blood start to bloom, the surprise crossing Hannibal's face.

This isn't supposed to happen.

He can feel himself screaming, but he isn't sure what he's saying. All he's sure of is that his world is ending.

"Will!" Hannibal exclaims, and Will jerks, trying to pull himself away from Jack, fighting against him, confused when Jack uses his body against him, pulls him into a hug instead.

"Will, come on, focus on me," Jack's saying, except it's. Except it's. Except. It's.

“Hannibal?” Will asks, shuddering.

“That’s right, Will. Calm down. Come back to us, Will,” Hannibal is saying, holding Will close to him. They’re on their knees in the middle of the room, the chairs both knocked over.

“I don’t. What. Hannibal?” Will asks again, trying to figure out why he’s shivering so hard.

“That’s right, Will,” Hannibal repeats. “Are you with me?”

Will looks around, looking for Jack and the SWAT team and the daemons Velia tore through... but it’s just him, wrapped in Hannibal’s arms, with Brina watching him from a few feet away, leaned heavily against Velia.

“What happened?” he asks, frowning when it comes out mumbled and almost slurred.

Hannibal eases his hold on him, reaching over to pick up a chair. Will lets Hannibal lead him a few steps over to it. Lets Hannibal lower him into the chair. Lets Hannibal press a hand to his forehead.

“You had another episode, Will,” Hannibal says, and it only takes Will a few moments to remember what his question had been in the first place. “What did you see, Will?”

Will shakes his head. He can’t tell Hannibal about that. He can’t even put that into words. It’s too plausible, too realistic. He’s afraid that if he says it, he’ll be putting it out there, asking for it to really happen.

Hannibal shares a look with Velia, who has herded Brina to Will’s side. As Brina climbs onto his lap, Velia walks to Hannibal and whispers in his ear. Will watches him nod at her,

“Will,” Hannibal says, standing up from the crouch he’s in and stepping back. “Will, Velia and I are worried about you.”

“We think you might be ill. You need to see a doctor, Will,” Velia continues.

Will recoils, glaring at them, “That’s not. I. You’re a doctor.”

“Will-”

“No. No, Hannibal. You don’t get to just. You don’t get to do this,” he says, trying to keep his voice from rising.

“Will, we’re not trying to do-”

“Stop it. Just stop telling us what to do,” Brina growls, jumping off of Will’s lap and backing away from them.

Velia follows her, “Brina, no, it’s not like that. We’re worried about you.”

“Oh, is that it?” Will asks, laughter creeping in.

“Will, you know that we care about you,” Hannibal responds, frustration seeping into his voice. “These episodes aren’t healthy. You’re working too much. You’re too stressed, and you aren’t taking care of yourself---”

Brina cuts him off with a bark of laughter, “Self care, Hannibal?”

He looks at her, nodding, and she snarls, “Self care would involve a lot of things that wouldn’t go well for you, now wouldn’t it?”

Hannibal and Will both physically jerk at that statement, but she continues, spitting the words out angrily and advancing suddenly on Velia, who seems unsure of what to do, “Self care would involve not keeping secrets that are costing people their lives. Self care would involve getting as far away as possible from the... from the... from the *cannibals*!”

“Brina,” Velia says, voice low and hurt.

But Brina isn’t having it, she just growls right in her face, “Tell me I’m wrong, Velia.”

When Velia doesn’t say anything, Brina stalks towards the door, “Come on, Will. We’re going home.”

Will hesitates for a moment, leaning toward Hannibal. He doesn’t want to leave things this way. None of this was supposed to happen. They were supposed to work on tying flies tonight. This wasn’t...

He tries to catch Hannibal’s eye, but Hannibal won’t look at him, his chest visibly rising as he breathes, almost heaving.

With a noise that’s very much *not* a choked off sob, Will gives in and follows her out the door.

Brina is silent until they get in the car. As soon as the door closes, she lets out a low whine that almost echoes. Brina is still until they pull away. As soon as they’re on the road, she begins to shake. Brina is quiet until they’re miles away. As soon as they’re on the interstate, she whispers to him.

“Do you hate me?”

“Bri, no, never. Come on. Everything you said was-” he cuts himself off, clears his throat, “Everything you said was true.”

“I don’t want us to take care of ourselves if it means we lose them,” she whispers.

“Me neither.”

He reaches a hand over, and she immediately shoves her head into it, her whine getting louder.

“What do we do, Will?”

He shrugs and keeps driving. It’s all he knows to do.

“Will. Will!”

Will jerks, slipping and falling as he does. He lets out a gasp, breathing in hard afterward and looking around, trying to figure out where he is. “What. I. What?”

“Will,” Brina says, her voice breaking through his confusion.

“Brina?”

“Will,” Brina says, “You’ve got to get up and come over here. You have to get out of that.”

He looks down at his hands. They’re resting in a mess. Blood. There’s blood everywhere. “Brina?”

“That’s right, come here. Come over here, to me, Will. Get away from that.”

“Where are we?” he asks, trying to move away from the puddle of blood. He bumps into something, though. When he turns, he has to focus on not puking. The body on the floor is a wreck, blood everywhere and full of strange looking slashes. There are... flowers? Flowers poking out of them.

“We’re back at that restaurant. I don’t remember how we got here. We were driving, leaving Hannibal’s... and then we were here, and you were just laying there and you were convulsing, and there’s so much blood, please, Will, come over here. Get away from that.”

He makes his way to her, not bothering to get off of his hands and knees. When he gets to her, to clean floor, he lets himself collapse. He trembles a little as she presses her nose to his face.

“Will,” she whispers against his temple, “I think. I think maybe they were right.”

“Yeah,” he says, looking back over at the body. “We need. Need to call someone.”

He shoves a hand in his pocket, pleased when he comes up with a phone. He dials the first person he can think of.

“Lo?” she answers, voice tired. He obviously woke her up. He almost hangs up.

Instead, he answers, “Hey. Uh. It’s Will. Graham.”

“Well, yeah. What’s up, Will? What’s wrong?” she sounds more alert now.

“I need help, Bev.”

It takes Beverly an hour to get to him, and when she comes in, she can’t stop the involuntary exclamation. “Oh, God.”

He looks up at her from the floor and laughs, “Yeah. Uh. Pretty much.”

“Will.”

“Did I do this, Bev?” he asks, and he hates how quiet his voice is.

“Fuck,” she replies. She steps around him, edging her way around the scene.

After what seems like forever- and for all he knows anymore, it might be-, she finally responds to the question, “I am almost 100 percent certain that you didn’t do this. It’s pretty obviously a suicide. A long, terrible, drawn out suicide. But, nonetheless. I’m no you, but I’m betting by the-ugh- by the flowers? That this guy’s the missing link in the lover’s quarrel triangle from the other day. I mean, I’m not an expert like Zeller and Price apparently are, but these flowers seem pretty obvious.”

He nods, accepting it.

“I’ve got to call someone about this, Will,” she says finally. Her eagle ruffles his feathers from his perch on the back of a booth, obviously waiting for Will to flip out.

Instead he just nods. Asks, “Can you get them to send an ambulance, too?”

“Ambulance? You hurt?”

He shakes his head, “Not like that. Just. Um. Pretty sure we’re sick, Bev. Hannibal thinks we might be, but that wasn’t a pretty fight. Think he’s right, though.”

It’s taking everything he has in him to keep himself upright. Brina gave up ages ago, collapsing across his lap and trembling, not even caring that he was covered in this guy’s blood.

Beverly nods, sitting down in the booth nearest to him. He leans his head back on the chair behind him and looks at her as she makes the call. She doesn’t call Jack, and he wants to cry a little bit over that. He’s not sure he’s ever been as thankful for something in his life.

When she hangs up, she looks at him. She looks like she wants to cry. He doesn’t want to make anyone cry. He just wants to go to sleep. He just wants to wake up to Hannibal’s breakfasts. He just wants this to be a bad dream.

“They’re on their way, Will.”

“Thanks, Bev,” he says, and he’s pretty sure he slurs as he says it, but he can’t really bring himself to care.

“We’re going to get you taken care of,” she answers, and he sighs as she leans forward, resting a palm against his forehead.

“Thank, Bev.” He’s pretty sure he already said that. He’s pretty sure it makes sense to say it again, though. He’s pretty sure.

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Brina hates the hospital.

Nothing terrifies her more than jolting awake and not knowing where she is for that first breath or two.

The smell, the walls, the noises, it doesn’t matter how distinctive they are, there’s always that first beat of confusion. Nothing smells right. It smells of disinfectant, of course, but also of sadness and loss, of illness and fear. The walls are thin and so white. There’s no tear in the wallpaper or splatter from that time Will tripped over that dog and spilled his entire dinner. There are so many noises,

too. People crying two floors away, constant beeps and whines from machinery, all the labored breathing... the noises inevitably make her press her ears against the bedsheets and whine.

After that initial panic comes the spike of fear as she reaches out for Will and finds the response so weak, the panic as she looks around to confirm that he's with her.

Of course, as horrifying as all of that is, it's far less tedious than the wait afterward. The feeling of being trapped, the doctors coming in and out, the judgmental eyes of their daemons. Brina's never been a fan of zoos, and being trapped in a hospital room makes her feel like nothing more than a caged in animal on display for all to see.

When they were younger, they spent more time than they wanted to in and out of hospitals. Since they've grown up, they've cut down on that time, but given their line of work, they haven't cut it out entirely.

She thinks that she'd eventually get used to it. She thinks it would eventually rend her heart a bit less. And yet.

And yet.

Last time they were in the hospital, things were a bit better. When she'd jerked awake, Velia had been there. Hannibal had been there. She'd relaxed. She'd known they'd take care of her.

As she looks around this time, she tries not to let their absence pull at her.

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Hannibal's appointments drag on forever the day following Will and Brina's exit. He's spent the day on edge, almost jumping at every noise, just waiting for the SWAT team to show up. He's preoccupied, considering the events of the past twenty-four hours. Velia and he had spent much of the night before packing their essentials, reviewing their escape plans, debating whether they should wait to see how things went down or if they should get a head start on leaving. In the end, they'd decided to risk staying. After all, knowing that his secrets may be spilling into the world is a decent enough warning to them, so he and Velia are relatively certain they can get away if needed.

Luckily, Hannibal isn't an extremely effusive psychiatrist in the first place, so his patients don't realize anything is amiss with him.

His last patient has been gone for less than ten minutes when his phone rings. He doesn't allow himself any disappointment when the display tells him that it's Abigail calling rather than Will. It's been too long since he spoke to the girl. Catching up with her will be a good distraction from his current thoughts.

"Abigail, hello," Hannibal says.

"Dr. Lecter! Hey." She sounds stressed.

"Is everything alright, Abigail?"

"Not really. Alana asked me to call you. We're at the hospital."

"What's happened? Is it Alana?"

“No, no. It’s Will.”

Hannibal sits down heavily at that.

When Hannibal arrives at the hospital, he first sees Alana. She’s sitting on a bench outside, head in her hands. As he approaches, she looks up at him, and he’s intrigued by the play of emotion on her face. Velia stays a few steps behind him, but he can feel her curiosity toward Alana.

“How is he?” Hannibal asks.

Alana sighs and scoots over, making room for him, “He’s pretty bad. Beverly Katz called me this morning. He had some sort of breakdown at a crime scene and, God, Hannibal, the way she talked it sounded like he wasn’t sure if he’d killed the guy or not. She said when she got there she couldn’t even tell if he was hurt or not, that he was just so covered in blood.”

A thrill runs through Hannibal at that. Will. Beautiful Will.

“That sounds terrifying,” Hannibal says, taking the space she’s offered.

“That’s the word she used, too.”

“What was the diagnosis?”

“He was unconscious by the time they got him here, but based on what he’d told Beverly and what little bit they could get out of Brina, they did a scan. It was encephalitis. Advanced. Very advanced. They’re treating them for it now.”

He nods, “Good. Encephalitis is-”

“Why didn’t you catch this, Hannibal?” Alana asks, interrupting him, shifting to face him. “You’re his psychiatrist.”

“I’m not his psychiatrist. I’m his friend, who happens to be a psychiatrist. The same position you are in, I daresay.”

“Don’t, Hannibal. Don’t pretend that you aren’t his psychiatrist. You should have noticed this, Hannibal.”

“I am not his psychiatrist, Alana. Jack may have asked me to give an assessment of him, but Will and I have both moved past that.”

Velia’s tail twitches against his ankle, and he looks down at her, nodding. “Regardless, I approached Will last night about the possibility that he and Brina might be ill. They didn’t take the news well at all.”

“So you worried that he was sick, made him mad, and then just let him leave? Hannibal.” Alana cuts herself off, shakes her head. “What was he even doing with you last night? I tried to make dinner plans with him, but he led me to believe he had...”

Hannibal arches an eyebrow at her, trying not to smirk at her as she finally finds words to continue her thought, “Hannibal. Are you and Will *seeing* each other?”

“Well, I must admit, we’ve not really discussed our situation,” Hannibal says, trying to figure out how best to phrase what he and Will share for Alana to understand. If he and Will even share anything anymore, that is.

Before he can try to elaborate, Alana is on her feet in front of him, glaring, “Hannibal! Hannibal, he’s your patient-”

“-he isn’t my patient, Alana.”

“-he may as well be, Hannibal. How can you do this? Hannibal, it’s-”

“Enough, Alana. We can sit here and go over this eternally, and I doubt either of us would ever choose to see the other’s side, or we can acknowledge our disagreement on the subject and go into this hospital and see our friend. Which will it be, Alana?”

She looks like she’d like to hit him, and if they weren’t in such a public place Hannibal would welcome the chance for violence. The chance to destroy something right now would actually calm his nerves quite a bit. Alas.

Instead of hitting him, though, she finally just sighs, tossing her hands up. “Come on, Hannibal. I’ll show you what room he’s in.”

“Thank you, Alana.” He gives her one of his most charming smiles, and has to fight not to let it grow when she scowls in response. She turns, almost storming away from him.

He follows her to Will’s room, stepping into the room after her.

Will looks terrible, barely awake where he’s resting in the bed. Abigail’s perched on the chair beside the bed, leaned toward him and talking quietly. Brina’s asleep at the foot of the bed, curled against Will’s legs.

Abigail glances over and smiles at him. He returns the smile, pleased when Will turns his head, catches sight of Hannibal, and smiles as well.

“Abigail, Will, lovely to see you both,” Hannibal says.

“And you as well, Hannibal,” Abigail responds, grin widening for a moment. Alana steps forward though, motioning toward the door with her head, so Abigail leans forward and hugs Will, “Get some rest, okay?”

Will nods, waving at her and Alana as Alana says her own goodbye.

Once the two have exited, Hannibal moves to sit by the bed. He allows his fingers to ghost over Will’s, and cannot help a small smile when Will’s hand twists, catching his.

“Are you feeling any better?” Hannibal asks.

Will nods, and Hannibal settles into the chair, attempting to get comfortable.

“Owe you an ‘pology,” Will mumbles. “Y’were right about me being sick. ‘Cephalitis? Brain’s all messed up.”

Hannibal stretches a hand out and runs it along Will's forehead. Velia hums contentedly when Will leans slightly into it. "There's no need to apologize, Will. You were quite ill, and I knew better than to distress you when you were already under such stress."

"Still. Hope you don't hate us."

Velia hops lightly onto the bed, butting her head against his arm, "We could never hate you, Will."

"*Right.* That's believable," Will laughs.

"She tells the truth, Will. There is something about you and Brina. You've made yourselves far too dear to us."

Will smiles at that, head lolling a bit as he starts to doze off.

Hannibal is content to sit by him for a bit, and only takes his leave when his phone rings with some business he's been putting off and should see to now that things seem to be evening back out.

The drive to Muskrat Farm is a long one. It's fine, though. It gives him plenty of time to discuss the details of the trip with Velia.

They're heading to meet the brother- the financier, so to speak- of a client that Hannibal's come to admire, to a degree. She was sentenced to see a psychiatrist after attempting to murder her brother. After hearing about her brother, even knowing that his patient is an unreliable source, Hannibal has to admit that he's almost sad she failed. After seeing the scars lining the mind and body of his patient, he has to admit that he's felt more than the occasional curl of protective anger rolling around.

Mr. Verger had been calling for the past two weeks, trying to arrange a meeting with him, but Hannibal's been tied up in his own business for that time, unable to do so. It should definitely be an interesting meeting.

Even after they get to the farm, it takes a while to be led to Mr. Verger. The farm is huge, sprawling, and of course the man isn't waiting for them near the house. Hannibal expected no less of him. Mason Verger is a man who thrives in power, and putting people in uncomfortable positions is one of the most obvious tricks in the book for gaining an upper hand.

Unfortunately for Mason Verger, Hannibal and Velia are not easily made uncomfortable.

They're led to a platform above a pig enclosure, and Velia takes one last moment to sigh out of the range of their hearing before putting on her professional face. His daemon, an alligator lounging near the edge of the platform, seems to spot them first, but Hannibal has no doubt that Mason is aware of their presence. Hannibal pulls his phone out and shoots off a random text message to Will (a reminder to listen to the doctors and that he needs to eat) as a show of how unimpressed he is, putting the phone away only when Mason turns to speak to him.

"Dr. Lecter."

"Mason Verger. So very nice to meet you."

Mason smiles at him, moving slightly too close to Hannibal as he speaks, “Thank you for accepting my invitation!”

“I’m prone to old-world politeness,” Hannibal says, plastering a smile on, “Would have seemed rude to say no.”

Mason grins a predatory grin at that. Hannibal feels his own predatory urges in him waking up, eager to be let loose on this pathetic being. Eventually, he thinks. Eventually.

“Since I’m paying for Margot’s therapy, I thought I should at the very least meet her psychiatrist.” “I enjoy putting a face to the name,” Hannibal responds.

As the pigs let out a particularly loud set of squeals, Velia glances over the edge, sniffing a bit in distaste at the smell. Hannibal quirks his lips at her, and turns to Mason, “Your swine are exceptional. I have never seen pigs like these.”

Mason’s smile takes on a dark curl and he laughs a bit, “They’re a special breed.”

After that, Mason makes small talk with him, describing to him the history of his farm. Hannibal listens, mildly interested, taking in the quirks and power moves of Mason, reading the stories he is telling without meaning to.

Finally, the conversation comes around to Margot again.

“Do you have a sister, Dr. Lecter?”

He spares Mischa a thought, but a quick one, unwilling to let Mason pick up on anything, “I had a sister.”

“Then you understand my need to protect Margot. Mostly from herself. She’s pathological,” Mason says, suddenly trying to seem sympathetic, “I’m sure she’s told you horrible things I’ve done.”

“I can’t tell you what Margot’s confessed to me.” He leans forward slightly, as if to confide in Mason, “Fortunately for you, I can’t tell anyone.”

Mason laughs uncomfortably, “Got me.”

Velia catches Hannibal’s attention, flicking an ear at him. He nods almost imperceptibly, and throws his pitch to Mason, “Even the worst of us need someone to talk to, Mason. Have you ever considered therapy for yourself?”

Mason considers it, and then beams, “Maybe I should.”

He claps his hands together and switches topics quickly, “Can I have Carlo slaughter you a hog? A token of my appreciation for all that you do for Margot?”

“Please. But, I must insist on selecting my own pig. Always do.”

Mason’s laugh is delighted, and Hannibal can’t wait to rip it from his throat.

=====

Velia has never been one to judge people based on their daemons. Oh, certainly, the ‘science’ exists and the studies are out there about symbolism and natural habits versus subconscious traits, but Velia’s always dismissed it. After all, daemons get some choice in the matter. When most daemons settle, people are old enough to put together that they will be judged on their daemons.

She remembers hearing the other boys at the boarding school muttering with their daemons, dissuading them from settling as weasels or rats, encouraging snakes and birds. She herself put a lot of thought into her form, without much input from Hannibal. Velia loved being a bear, towering above others and menacing them into leaving Hannibal alone. She adored the strength of the tiger, the sleek beauty of it and the power that came with those claws. She spent so much time as a viper that Hannibal seemed surprised when she didn’t choose that one.

Instead she chose a smaller cat, beautiful and deceiving with its power. People too often forget that she’s a member of the big cat family, too caught up on her elegance and beauty. They forget that she’s just as dangerous as those bears and tigers and vipers she still sometimes dreams about.

When they meet Mason Verger, when they see his behemoth of an alligator, it’s all she can do not to laugh at the two.

Mason Verger and his alligator... pathetic.

She can’t wait until Hannibal is done with them.

=====

Will abhors hospitals. It’s a sentiment he’s expressed before, and he’s almost certain it’s a sentiment he’ll express again. Brina shares it, so at least he isn’t alone in his misery. Granted, that really doesn’t make the situation any better. He spends three days under observation, which is a bit much in his opinion.

Hannibal and Velia are there for as much of it as they can be. Hannibal cancels and reschedules his appointments, settles himself in beside the bed, and spends hours on end talking to Will about anything and everything. Velia entertains Brina, making sure she doesn’t get too fussy with the nurses and grooming her when she gets too grumpy. It helps. A lot.

Hannibal waves Will’s apologies off, runs a hand lovingly over Brina’s ears when she manages to huff out her own apology. He even gives his own apology, expressing how he wishes he’d handled the subject with more care. It’s nice, and Will can feel some of the tension bleed out over that alone.

The only time Hannibal excuses himself in those first couple of days is when Alana and Abigail stop by. Will thinks that it’s probably more to do with Alana than Abigail, given Alana’s slightly cold demeanor toward Hannibal. It’s odd, coming from her, but he doesn’t ask about it. He has more than enough on his mind without their argument.

Their visit is nice, though. They update him on Abigail’s recovery, on how Abigail has settled into Alana’s beautifully, on how easily the two have worked their way into the other’s life. Alana assures him that she’s been checking on the dogs, while Abigail tells him a story about trying to teach Buster a trick. He’s cracking up by the end of it and feels infinitely better knowing that his pack has someone stopping in to visit with them.

On the third day, Hannibal does get a call, some sort of emergency with one of his patients. He tries to dismiss it, but Will sends him on and calls to ask Alana for a ride home.

It's a nice ride home, relaxed in the backseat of Alana's car with Brina curled up in his lap.

Well, it's nice until Alana brings up Hannibal.

"Will, I don't mean to pry, but I spoke with Hannibal the other day and he implied that you two are... maybe in a relationship?"

He chokes a little bit, turning that over in his mind. He finally manages to get out a quiet, "We haven't really talked about it? I guess?"

"That's what he said. Will, is that really a good idea? Isn't he your psychiatrist?"

He can see Abigail trying not to laugh in the front, so he kicks her seat gently before answering. "He's not my psychiatrist. We talk, but it's not like that. I mean, he tells me just as much as I tell him."

"Does he, Will? Or do you just think that he does? That's a trick a lot of psychiatrists work with. How much do you really know about Hannibal Lecter?"

Will raises an eyebrow, then admits, "A lot more than you'd expect, Alana."

"Will-

"Look, Alana. I appreciate you being... worried? But, if you could just drop it, that would be great. I don't need a lecture like this right now."

She frowns at him in the rearview mirror, but nods, "I'll drop it. For now. You're not getting out of this conversation, Will."

They ride in silence until they get him home, where Alana heads in to make sure that he's got everything he needs while Abigail follows him when he heads toward the woods with the dogs.

"She doesn't mean to pry," Abigail tells him, her heron fluttering ahead to land on a fallen log, cocking its head to watch Brina nipping at the pack.

"Is that so?" he asks.

"She just worries about you, is all," Abigail replies. She moves to sit on the log next to her heron, and the two look at Will at the same time.

"I appreciate it, but I'm fully capable of taking care of myself," Will answers.

Abigail raises an eyebrow at him, gives him a few moments, and then sighs, "Are you, though, Will?"

"Of course I am, Abigail."

"I mean, you just had some sort of brain disease freak out..."

"That's- I was sick, Abigail. That doesn't mean I'm a child."

“Of course not. That wasn’t what I meant. I just mean... we just- she just, she just worries about you is all. I think she’s being really hard on herself because she didn’t notice that you were sick. She thinks she should have.”

“Why should she have noticed?”

“Something about being a psychiatrist. Being your friend.” Abigail shrugs at him.

“That’s ridiculous,” he answers.

She shrugs again. He laughs a little, getting distracted as he notices Sasha rolling in something.

Jack stops by the day after he’s been sent home from the hospital. As he climbs out of the car, he waves at Will, a folder clutched in his hand.

“How’s it going, Will?” he asks, joining him on the porch.

“A lot better than it’s been going,” Will answers.

Jack laughs a bit. “That’s good, right?”

“Guess so.”

“Better enough to take a look at this?”

Brina growls, causing Jack to frown at her. Will sighs, “Jack, come on. I just got out of the hospital.”

“I know, Will, I do. But while you were in there we got three dead bodies- three, Will- and I need you to look at this, because it reads like the Ripper to me.”

It’s not the Ripper. Will wants to shake Jack and scream that in his face.

“Jack, you’re obsessed. You need to stop. Let the police handle it, if they find something-”

“They don’t know the Ripper like we do, Will. How will they know if they find something?”

“Jack-”

“Just take a look, Will. I know it’s him.”

Will doesn’t take a look. He doesn’t open the folder that Jack sets on his lap. He picks it up, then sets it on the ground between them. “I’m not doing it, Jack. I just got out of the hospital. The doctor said I need to avoid stressful situations, take it easy for a while.”

“Will-”

“No, Jack. I’m not going to open it. I’m not going to take a look. I’m taking a break from all of that. The doctor told me to, Alana told me to, Hannibal told me-”

“Hannibal told you to, did he?”

“And Alana. And the doctors at the hospital.”

Jack frowns at that, “Look, Will, if you really feel that way-”

“I do, Jack-”

“-and it’s not just you parroting back something you’ve been fed-”

“What the hell’s that supposed to mean?”

“-then we can see what we can do when it comes to lessening the workload. But just because somebody doesn’t like what you’re doing, that doesn’t mean people stop killing other people, Will. And if you can save-”

“Enough, Jack. I’ve heard your spiel before, and I don’t need whatever guilt trip this is. I said I’m not looking at this and I mean it. I don’t know what you’ve suddenly got against Hannibal, but I’ll remind you that you’re the one who brought him around in the first place.”

“I just didn’t expect you two to end up so...” Jack struggles to find the words he wants as Will crosses his arms, glaring at him and just as defensive as Brina at the moment. “I don’t know, Will. I just think maybe we don’t know him like we think we do, is all.”

“If that’s the best you’ve got, Jack, I can go ahead and tell you. I’m not opening this. I am cutting back on the crime scenes. It’s not healthy.”

Jack scowls at him, but Will doesn’t budge. Brina straightens up next to him, settling in and glaring.

“Fine. If that’s how you feel, I’ll drop it. I’ve got a lot of work to do, so I’m just going to...”

“Yeah, that’s probably for the best.”

“I’ll call you, Will.”

Will nods, “I’m sure you will.”

=====

Brina’s used to people walking all over them.

When they were younger, they were bullied often in school. Others pushed them around, shoving them into walls and stealing their things. It didn’t matter how many teachers they mentioned it to, they were always ignored. Things calmed down slightly when Brina settled so early, but picked back up when the other familiars caught up with her.

From school they moved on to odd jobs, where other employees’ slack fell back on them, where bosses yelled and threatened. More schooling, of course, led to more bullies; they were both disappointed to see that nothing changed in college. If anything, it was worse.

Even on the force, Will had spent most of his time picking up cases the others didn’t want anything to do with.

Until they found out just how talented he was at solving those murders...

It was better, for a while. It was better until they realized how trying it was on Will, how he was bringing his work home, haunted by this swirl of faces he couldn't help. It was better until they realized that Will was bringing home those mirrored urges. They'd quit the force quickly after realizing that.

They hadn't expected to go back to being walked all over when they started up at the Academy. Teaching, they could do that. They could be in charge. They could watch and speak and step back, in charge of their own lives and distanced from everyone around them.

Brina should have known it would never last. As soon as Jack mentioned that first case to them, she knew.

She hadn't counted on Hannibal. She hadn't expected his influence. She hadn't expected for them to finally find their voices.

=====

Will shows up unannounced. It's something that, from others, Hannibal abhors. He wonders why it is that it doesn't bother him when it's Will. Velia blames it on the happiness the two bring them, suggests it might be the comfort they take from his company. He's loathe to admit it, but honest enough with himself not to completely dismiss the thought.

Regardless, when Hannibal opens the door to reveal the disheveled man and his sulking coyote, he smiles.

"Will. How lovely to see you. Come in."

They move around comfortably, Hannibal pouring wine for them both as Will heads into the sitting room. He sits beside Will and feels himself inexplicably relax when Will leans against him.

"I told Jack I was taking a break. Cutting back. Something."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows in surprise, "Is that so?"

"Yeah."

"I take it that it didn't go well?"

"That's a correct assumption," Brina answers, circling on the carpet a few times before collapsing. She sticks her tongue out when Velia mutters something about dogs while she settles in beside her.

"I hope the argument didn't do any irreparable damage," Hannibal tells them.

Honestly, he wouldn't mind at all. Without Jack's influence, Hannibal feels that it will be much easier to convince Will of, well, whatever he needs to convince him of in order to remain by his side. He's been worried, of course, that working so closely with Jack and his obsession with Hannibal's work would lead this newly well Will to speak up about Hannibal's activities.

"I don't think so. I mean, I'll still help out occasionally, I just need a break. He's so... everything is about the Ripper, you know?"

Hannibal inclines his head, but answers, "I'd imagine if the Ripper were as busy as Jack assumes, he'd have little time for anything else."

Will snorts, “You’d know. I do have to tell you, Hannibal. You need to be careful, if you ever... it’s... I think Jack thinks something’s up with you.”

Hannibal shifts so that he’s facing Will, who is looking quite uncomfortable at the conversation.

“What do you mean, Jack thinks something is up with me?”

Brina is the one to answer. “He kept focusing on the fact that you suggested we take a break. Alana, the doctors, none of them mattered to him. He was just kept saying, ‘Hannibal thinks that, Hannibal said that, Hannibal, Hannibal’ when Will would tell him that everyone recommended a break.”

“What did you do?” Velia asks Will.

It’s Brina who speaks for him again, “We kept bringing up Alana and the doctors.”

While they’ve been speaking, Will’s been looking more and more frustrated.

“What is it, Will?” Hannibal asks, resting a hand on his arm. He doesn’t care for the way Will tenses up at it.

“Alana... Abigail said something that made me think on something, Hannibal. Alana’s mad because she didn’t notice the encephalitis.”

“An odd thing to beat oneself up over,” Hannibal replies.

“Exactly,” Will continues, “because she and I haven’t been spending very much time together lately. The thing is, you’re a doctor, too, Hannibal. How is it that you didn’t notice this?”

“Will,” Hannibal answers, “If you’ll recall, we had a significant argument surrounding your self care, right before your hospitalization.”

“No, I remember that. I remember- I’m sorry again, for that. But, see, Alana seems to think that the symptoms should have been really obvious much earlier.”

“Alana thinks I should have noticed your illness?” Hannibal asks. Velia and Brina have gone silent, watching from the floor.

“No. Alana thinks that *she* should have noticed. *I* am the one wondering why you didn’t notice.”

“Will,” Hannibal answers, trying to control the annoyance and anger threatening to build up. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed this about me or not, but I’m rather fond of you. That fondness, I’m afraid, interferes with my ability to think with clarity when it comes to topics that pertain to you.”

Will looks over at Velia, who ignores him and nuzzles at Brina’s neck.

“Will,” Hannibal continues, but is cut off.

“No, you’re right. I’m sorry. I know. I know you would have mentioned something. And, uh, I’m... rather fond of you, too.” And though the words flow together, quick and muttered, Hannibal can feel his heart warming at that statement. He knows that others have had feelings for him before, but it’s been years since he felt them for anyone else, and this is certainly the first time they’ve been returned.

Hannibal sits back against the sofa, pulling Will against him.

Hours later, after dinner and a few more glasses of wine, Hannibal has talked Will into spending the night. It's no small feat, considering the dogs waiting for him at his house, so Hannibal feels it's a victory worth noting.

As he watches Will walk toward him in his favorite pair of pajamas, he's struck with an odd sense of comfort. He imagines that this is perhaps what people mean when they speak of things that make them feel at home.

Will slides into bed carefully, and they wait for the girls to make themselves comfortable along Hannibal's other side before Hannibal reaches over to turn off the lamp.

The silence between them is a comfortable one, but he isn't upset when Will breaks it.

"I was going to work on my flies tomorrow, fish some. Would you be interested in joining me?"

Hannibal smiles against Will's shoulder, "As much as I would enjoy that, I have an appointment tomorrow that cannot possibly be rescheduled."

"That important?" Will asks.

"Unfortunately, yes. I believe I've mentioned the Vergers to you?"

"That girl who tried to kill her brother?"

"The very same."

"She's that important? You can't reschedule her?"

"It's actually her brother I'm meeting with. I've taken him on as a patient as well."

"That's not a conflict of interest or anything?" Will asks.

"Possibly, but I'm sure it hasn't escaped your notice that I'm a bit unconventional."

"Yeah, no. I noticed."

"He is quite the character. I must admit, I mostly took him on as a patient because I was interested in getting his full story from him."

"Has it worked?"

Velia groans, "Far, far too effectively. The man is appalling. The things he's done, the things he boasts about. His sister got pregnant to try to produce an heir, and he staged an accident, made her lose it. Horrible, horrible man."

"I thought there was something called doctor patient confidentiality," Brina replies, but Hannibal can feel her cringing at the words.

"I'm certain that I told you we would keep no secrets from you and Will, Brina," Velia answers.

“Indeed. We are quite lucky that you two don’t ask very many questions.”

“So what are you going to do about him?” Will asks. “You can’t really go to the police with something he’s told you in private...”

“I have not decided yet,” Hannibal answers.

“Are you going to kill him?” Brina asks.

The silence that falls across them this time is far less comfortable than the previous one. Finally, Hannibal answers. Honestly.

“I’d rather hoped that if we decide to do that we might convince you two to participate.”

Will sits up, moving away, “Excuse me?”

“I had rather hoped we might convince the two of you to help us. We thought you might want to see that side of us, be with us and know us completely.”

“Hannibal, I told you that Jack’s suspicious of something with you and your answer is to ask us to help you kill one of your patients?”

“Will, I didn’t ask you,” Hannibal tells him.

“We were *going* to ask you,” Velia adds.

“That’s not a comforting distinction. What makes you think I would even want to help you kill this guy?”

“Aside from Velia’s story, he has done a great many deplorable things. In our last session, he told a story from his youth where he delighted in torturing a pair of strays, starving them until one of them attacked the other.”

Will climbs out of the bed, pacing away from them. “I don’t want to- no. Hannibal. That’s. I fucking hate that, but we don’t just get to kill people, Hannibal. It’s not a thing that people get to do.”

“Will, please, you misunderstand-”

“No. No, Hannibal. I tell you Jack’s suspicious of you and you try to talk me into killing someone? Hannibal, I thought you’d quit. Well, no, maybe I didn’t think you’d quit- but cut down, maybe? I haven’t come across anyone that you’ve- I. Just. Hannibal. I can’t...”

“Will, calm down. We didn’t mean to upset you,” Velia says. “We didn’t mean to go about it this way.”

“What, what were you going to do? Wait until I was having some fugue episode and take me to meet this asshole, hope for the best?”

Silence, it turns out, isn’t their friend in this instance. The pair of them are silent in response to that, for just a breath, but the breath is long enough for Brina to put it together.

Brina leaps off of the bed, stalking over to stand by Will, “You did know. You knew we were sick, and you were, you were going to wait on us to... you were going to trick us into *murdering* someone?”

“It’s nothing like that, Brina,” Velia answers, standing up and moving toward her. Brina growls, low and ugly, and she stops.

“I’m going home now,” Will tells him. He grabs his clothes, heading toward the door. He pauses, as if waiting for Hannibal to say something, to stop him. Unfortunately, Hannibal finds himself in an unusual position, frozen in spot by too much emotion and confusion. When he says nothing, Will leaves, Brina quick on his heels.

As the door slams downstairs, Hannibal cannot help the metaphors that run through his head.

They do not sleep after Brina and Will leave. Instead, they spend quite a bit of time discussing their options, trying to decide if they should leave the country or not, wondering once again if perhaps that was a push too far for Will and Brina.

Mason’s appointment manages to take him by surprise.

He spends most of the appointment in the same sort of half-there state that he spends most of his regular appointments. He nods along and listens, seeming attentive, while actually focusing completely on something else.

Mason sprawls in a chair, his alligator lounging underneath him and watching Velia too closely.

“-and Margot, she was a wretched child, Dr. Lecter. She was so shrill and pushy. Mother doted on her, it was disgusting.”

He nods, “I can see how that would get on your nerves, Mason.”

“That’s probably why those girls annoyed me so much, when we started having those day camps visit. Their shrieking and complaining... and, well, after those two girls, those weak little boys were the obvious next step. They were asking for it, really,” Mason says, his alligator nodding under him.

Hannibal shares a look with Velia, and while it doesn’t fill him in on the pieces he has obviously missed- something he’s sure he’ll berate himself for later-, it does tell him that whatever he’s missed has left her incensed.

“You’d be shocked at how easy it is to find buyers for kids, Dr. Lecter,” Mason tells him, grinning. He’s leaning forward now, watching Hannibal. Hannibal knows that Mason’s trying to goad him into something. Expressing dismay or shock, perhaps. Maybe even trying to see if Hannibal will call the authorities on him. He’s looked into Mason’s history. He knows that he’s ruined two other psychiatrists’ careers.

Hannibal considers his words, steeples his fingers, and leans forward a bit as well. “Did the ease shock you, Mason?”

Mason's face twitches a little, and he laughs, leaning back into the seat and cocking his head at Hannibal. "Yes, I have to say, Dr. Lecter... it did. I'd kind of expected to have more time with them, really. But, I guess I keep a little piece of them all with me as it is."

Mason leans forward just a bit, again, reaching down and stroking a finger along the alligator's bumpy head, "Do you remember those hogs you were so interested in, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal feels himself bristle at the implication, that Mason not only kidnapped and sold children, but separated them from their daemons in the process.

He holds himself still, refusing to let anything out, even as he hears the faintest of echoes floating through the halls of his memory palace. Mischa's laugh. Her tiny, lisped voice calling out his name. He thinks about Grutas, and for a moment all he can think about is how right the world felt when he'd started carving up the man's chest.

"That's remarkably clever, Mason," Hannibal replies, not letting anything on. Velia flicks an ear at him, the only sign that she's paying attention.

"I always thought so," Mason answers. Hannibal can tell that the man's frustrated. He's been trying his best during each meeting to get a rise out of Hannibal. Hannibal thinks that now might be the time to give him that reaction.

He stands, moving toward his desk. With ease, he holds a bottle up, raising an eyebrow at Mason, "A drink, Mason?"

Mason's eyes flash, and he knows that Mason's delighted by the unprofessional move. He can almost see the way Mason's thinking over how to twist this against him as he answers, "I would love a drink, *Hannibal*."

So Hannibal pours them both a drink. He raises the glass toward Mason, "Straight, Mason?"

As Mason nods, reaching out, Hannibal pauses, glancing toward the desk. He sets the drink down and picks a bottle up out of the cabinet, waving it lightly in the air.

"Or perhaps you'd prefer a cocktail?"

Mason's laugh is absolutely delighted, and Hannibal smiles as Mason replies.

"Why, Dr. Lecter! How positively *delightful*!"

Hannibal tips a couple of pills into his drink, passing it over.

"Cheers, Mason."

=====

At a very young age, Hannibal was forced to learn to control his emotions. They both were. They taught themselves to lock down everything, set it aside and ignore it.

It's something that has come in quite handy for them over the years. Velia would even wager that it's saved their lives a few times. It's certainly helped them avoid detection quite a few times.

The only time they faltered, lost control of their emotions, was when Grutas told them what he'd done with Mischa and Nikolas. She remembers the raw feeling of despair that had ripped through them, burning every bit of them that it touched. She'd lunged alongside Hannibal and together they had torn through the wretched beings in front of them, just as they'd torn into them. No one came out of that one intact. Grutas and his beast, obviously, had met quite a bloody end. Hannibal and Velia, though... something had changed within them as well. Something had curled up and died, screaming as it went.

The screams had sounded rather like those from the Lady Murasaki as she bore witness to the aftermath, and that death had certainly been confirmed as she walked away from them. Perhaps if she'd stayed, if she'd not turned from them, maybe they could have repaired themselves.

Velia considers this as she watches Mason peeling away his face, twirling the knife and cackling. It's been so long since they last lost control like this.

This one wasn't quite as surprising. She's felt it building up, waves of emotion slamming against their dams, for weeks now. Months, even. If she examines, she imagines it will all pinpoint back to Will Graham and Brina entering their lives.

As another piece of skin hits the floor with a plop, Velia turns her head to Hannibal and wonders... will Will and Velia kill another piece of them? Or are they stronger than the Lady Murasaki?

=====

There's something remarkably soothing about standing in the river, flicking the pole to watch the line fly ahead. It doesn't matter what's happening in the world around them. It's just them, the water, the fish, the sky, the air.

Will breathes in deep as he casts his line again.

Brina's curled up on the bank, watching him, tail dropped into the water.

He casts his line a few more times, before finally giving up, reeling it back in and wading over to plop on the ground beside her.

"I just don't know what to do, Brina."

"I wish I had some advice," she answers, resting her head on his leg.

He runs a hand through her fur, digging in a bit. Together they stare out over the river for a while.

She's the one that breaks the silence, "I can't believe that they thought we'd just-" She cuts herself off, shaking her head.

"I don't know what they thought any of that was a good idea."

"Is this because we didn't turn them in?" she asks. "'Oh, they didn't turn in, they must want to join us', maybe?"

He laughs a little, "Why haven't we turned them in, Bri? Why haven't we just... we see Jack all the damn time. We have the forensics group on speed dial. What's wrong with us?"

She nips at his thigh as she answers, "Nothing. There's nothing wrong with us. We're just..."

“Different?” he finishes, remembering when she’d last said these words to him.

He’d been curled up in bed, clutching a pillow to his chest and ignoring the sticky Louisiana heat. They’d just gotten home from a trial where the jackass had gotten off thanks to a few careless mistakes by the department. And all Will could do was think about how satisfying it would be to hunt him down and tear him limb from limb. The desire had been so strong and so real. He’d plotted the whole thing out on the way home, even moved around the house gathering up a few things he’d need. He’s not sure what had snapped, but something finally had, reminding him where he was and who he was.

They’d quit the force shortly after that, moved away.

“I don’t even know where we stand with them,” Will admits.

“Well, it’s safe to say they love us,” Brina answers, shifting her paws out from under her.

“Do they, though?” he asks.

“Will, don’t be silly. Look at how they act with us. For whatever reason, they do. They’re honest with us, even when we yell at them and runaway. They could have killed us a million times over.”

“If they love us so much, why didn’t they tell us about-”

“They did, though. Sure, it wasn’t timely or whatever, but they did tell us, Will.”

Will stands up, jostling her head off of him in the process, “I just. God. Bri. I don’t even know what to do anymore. This should be easy; it shouldn’t be this hard to figure out what to do. Why is this so hard?”

Brina stands up, too, stretching as she does, and bumps him, “Because we’ve never really loved someone?”

Will freezes, “Do we?”

“Love them?”

“Yeah.”

“I mean, do you want me to tell you the truth or lie to you?”

Will runs his hands through his hair, glares at her a bit, “We’ve got to figure this out, Bri.”

“I think we need to talk to them. You and I can discuss this back and forth all we want, and we’ll never know exactly what’s going on with them, or where they stand on things. And we can’t just figure it out for ourselves and expect them to be on the same page.”

“Yeah. You’re right. We need to... God, I’m just sick of arguing. Of apologizing.”

“Talking to them will get rid of a lot of that, you know. They’ll know what to expect of us, we’ll know what to expect of them. We can figure out... whatever this is between us all. What compromises we all need to make...”

“I’m pretty sure I hate you,” he sighs, heading toward the house.

She bounds after him, nipping at his ankles, “Yeah, yeah. You’d be lost without me, Graham.”

The walk’s a peaceful one, giving him plenty of time to consider the things that have been happening lately. He hasn’t seen Hobbs since getting out of the hospital, hasn’t lost time, hasn’t lost track of who he was. Granted, he hasn’t been to any scenes since then, but he figures that’s a pretty positive sign.

If they can just work this out with Hannibal and Velia, things might just turn out okay for them.

They’re halfway to Hannibal’s house when Alana calls.

He presses speakerphone and balances it on his leg, greeting her, “Hey, Alana.”

“Hey, Will. How’s it going?”

“Pretty well. Yourself?”

“I’ve been doing okay. Abigail’s doing great.”

He’s trying to decide a response to that when Alana continues, “I’d be doing better if we’d ended our last conversation on better terms, Will. That’s kind of what I was calling about. I was hoping we could meet up for lunch today, if you aren’t busy?”

“I’m actually on my way somewhere, Alana. I could meet up tomorrow, maybe?”

“I’ve got meetings all day tomorrow. Could you do dinner tonight? I’ll bring some food, Abigail, wine... the whole nine yards?”

“I’m... not really sure I’ll be available by then, Alana. I’m heading to Hannibal’s, he and I need to talk. It might take a while?”

“Will... I really don’t think-”

“Alana. I don’t want to hear about it right now. I’m sorry, but I don’t.”

He just wants to get to Hannibal’s and talk to him. Figure out where they stand. Figure out where they’re at, where they’re going. He just wants to quit stressing over this.

“Will, it’s important that we get a chance to talk about this. It’s not right-”

“No, Alana. No. We aren’t talking about it. Hannibal and I know what we’re doing.”

“Will-”

Brina reaches over and presses her nose to the end call button.

Will flexes his fingers around the steering wheel, “Thanks, Brina.”

She just sighs, pressing her nose against his leg.

Hannibal isn't at his house when they get there. Will knocks and knocks, rings the bell, peeks in the garage. Definitely not there.

"Well, fuck."

Brina nods, growling out her own frustration. "Wait, wait. Didn't he have an appointment today?"

"He did! We can head to the office; when he's done, we can talk to him. I feel like we probably argue less there anyway," Will agrees.

And so they head back to the car.

Later, when they look back on the moment, they'll disagree greatly as to whether it would be better or worse if they'd just waited for Hannibal and skipped the office.

Will's about to sit down in the waiting area when Brina starts growling. He looks over at her and almost jumps when he sees every hair on her standing up, "What's wrong?"

"There's a lot of blood in there, Will. I can smell it."

"Blood? Are you, are you sure?"

"Yes, Will, I'm positive. It's fresh and there's so much of it. What if he's not okay in there?"

"Is he alone?"

"No, there's someone else in there, and... is that an... alligator? Will, we need to go in there; we need to check on them."

Will only hesitates for a moment, then nods at her, moving to the door.

He takes a deep breath and opens it.

He really, really wishes he hadn't.

Hannibal turns to look at him, "Will. Lovely to see you. Have you met Mr. Verger here?"

Will can't even form words. He can't- it's like everything is just frozen in place as he stares at the man currently sprawled across one of Hannibal's chairs.

"Mason, this is my friend Will. Will, this is my patient, Mason."

"Helloooo," the man drawls, giggling as he says it. "Hello, hello, Will! How absolutely marvelous to meet you!"

Brina whines, moving behind Will. The man grins at her, and moves the knife in his hand back to his face. Will stares at him in horror as he presses the knife in, slowly peeling off a strip of his face.

His daemon rumbles on the floor, rolling onto her back. Mason dangles the strip for a moment, then drops it, singing out, “Caaatch, darling!”

The alligator catches the strip in his mouth, chomping it down loudly. As she rolls around a bit with it, Will notices a syringe sticking out of the skin of her throat.

“Did you drug them?” Will asks, voice breaking slightly as he asks.

“Well, yes. Mason was quite eager to take the concoction I offered him, but Lilith was a bit hesitant about it, so I had to use a bit of force with her.”

“Hannibal. What. What are you even doing here?”

Hannibal fixes him with an expression of disdain, mirrored by Velia from the ledge above them. “I believe we told you of our intentions for Mr. Verger here, did we not?”

“You wanted to kill him. What is *this*?! ”

“Oh, we’re certainly going to kill him. This is just the appetizer, Will.”

“Mason-” Will starts, looking toward him in horror.

“Mason is enjoying himself thoroughly,” Hannibal interjects. “Mason, how are you feeling?”

“Do you thiink we can write me a prescrippption for this, doctor? Enchanted, terrified,” Mason laughs.

“You see, Will? Enjoying himself.”

Will looks toward Velia, who at least has the decency to look away from him.

“I’m hungry,” Mason suddenly declares.

Before Will can reply, Hannibal does, looking him directly in the eyes, “Eat your nose, then.”

“Eat. My. Nose.” And so he starts cutting into his nose, pulling it off his face. He takes a bite out of it, and looks up at them, startled. “I have a taste. And... consistency? Similar to that of a chicken gizzard!”

“Hannibal...” Will turns away.

“Would you kill him, Will? Visit that mercy on him?” Hannibal asks.

Brina growls, and answers for him, “He’s your patient, Hannibal. You do what you think is best.”

“I’m FULL of myself!” Mason cackles.

“I had hoped for more from you,” Hannibal says, eyes flicking from Will to Brina. He walks slowly toward Mason.

As he snaps Mason’s neck, he looks into Will’s eyes.

“Now, Will, shall we-”

“No. I’m leaving, Hannibal,” Will answers. He looks away from Hannibal, away from the limp form of Mason. “I don’t know if you’ll be seeing us again.”

Hannibal looks down at the alligator, suddenly gone still, except for a loud panting.

“I see,” he says, and Will wishes he didn’t sound so disappointed.

Will wishes he didn’t feel so disappointed.

=====

One of the saddest truths of life is that everything is constantly changing. Nothing is ever permanent.

They’d learned that at a young age. Moving from town to town while his father searched for work, living through hurricanes, watching as his father slowly drank himself to death. Nothing was permanent, everything was fleeting.

That lesson made it easy to remember that they shouldn’t get attached to things. They shouldn’t put faith in things outside of themselves.

Even the dogs tended to come and go, whether they wandered off to look for the homes they’d once had or just got old and died.

Nothing was permanent. Nothing stayed the same. Nothing was immune to change.

Knowing that didn’t make it hurt less, though. Brina bit back a whine, curling up in the seat, making herself as small as possible. Will said nothing, stared blankly at the road ahead of him. Drove. Away from that office, from the mess, from all the blood. From Hannibal.

She’d thought they could have this. She’d thought they could be happy.

Foolish. So very, very foolish.

=====

Hannibal surveys the room. His armor is packed away, the books he would have the most trouble replacing, a few pieces that he’d managed to get emotionally attached to. Two bags, easy to grab. Two flights are booked, one in his name and one under an alias. Everything is in order.

“It was nice here,” Velia tells him.

“Indeed. It will be nice to return to Europe, though.”

She nods, jumping off of the bed. She stretches, then tilts her head, “One last dinner?”

“We do have quite a bit stored away. It would be a shame to let it all go to waste...”

Hannibal’s just started on the onions when Velia turns, looking toward the door. “We’ve got company, Hannibal.”

“Is it the police?”

“No, just one person. It’s Crawford.”

“Hmm. Shall we go see what business he has with us?”

“Yes. Let’s.”

They get to the door before Jack knocks, and Hannibal is pleased to see the surprise on his face as he opens it.

“Jack! What a pleasant surprise. Do come in.”

The Shepherd’s ears flatten a bit, but Jack gives him an uneasy smile, “Thanks, Dr. Lecter. I hope you don’t mind us showing up like this. I’d just hoped to talk to you about a few things.”

“Of course,” Hannibal replies, stepping aside so that the two can come in. There’s a certain level of satisfaction as they enter, keeping a bit of distance between Hannibal and Velia and themselves.

“I was just preparing dinner, Jack. Would you like to join us?”

“That would be nice, Hannibal. Thank you.”

“Would you care to sous chef, Jack?”

“I’m afraid I’d make a mess of it, my friend. I’ll have to decline.”

“As you wish,” Hannibal responds, smiling at him. He resumes his chopping, Velia settled at his feet now rather than her customary position across the room. Hannibal watches the Shepherd track her movements and takes a moment to center himself.

If this is how Jack wants to end it, then so be it.

“What were you hoping to talk with me about, Jack?”

Jack shifts, hand glancing over the holster Hannibal knows to be in his jacket for the briefest moment as he readjusts his stance, crossing his arms. His Shepherd shifts as well, feet spreading a bit, sturdying her stance. “I think you know why I’m here, Hannibal.”

His voice is steady, but Hannibal can hear his heartbeat pick up, can smell the anxiety pick up around him. He’s bluffing. He doesn’t have anything to say, he knows nothing. He’s bluffing, and Hannibal can read his cards clearly.

There are two ways this evening can go.

Hannibal can play the fool, let Jack walk himself in circles until he tires and gives up, and they can dine together. Afterward, Hannibal and Velia can leave, boarding the plane of their choice and traveling to the country of their choice. They never have to see this man and his dog again. They never have to think about this life again. It would be a clean exit, easy and painless.

The other way has the potential to be rife with pain, however. He can pick up this knife, use it on Jack. He can disarm him and take him down. A quick slice to his neck, or a jab to the liver, or a knife to the chest. He can use his frustration at this man, his sorrow over Will, his anger at himself,

and he can turn this into his finest display. Jack hasn't called for backup, no one knows he's here, trying to bait Hannibal. He can take his time with him, the greatest masterpiece. Afterward, he and Velia can board a plane under a false name, set out on a new life.

Or perhaps Jack will get a lucky hit in. Perhaps his Shepherd will overwhelm Velia. Many things can go wrong in that scenario. It will be far from painless.

He does not want to dine with this man. His words are tiresome, boring. And after all, Hannibal has never been one to avoid pain.

He can tell when Velia catches on, feels her ready herself at his feet.

"My dearest," he says quietly, smiling down at her. She looks up at him, affection radiating from her, and he knows that she understands the risks they shall both be taking.

He hurls his knife as she lunges, perfectly timed. He's always loved this part, the way they move together so practiced. Choreographed.

Jack's caught on, but the knife hits the hand holding his gun and it scatters. Hannibal jumps the counter, slamming into him. Jack is a sturdy man, but he's not prepared for the full force of Hannibal Lecter's body. They stumble backwards, and as Hannibal regains his footing, Jack lunges at him with the knife.

Something in Hannibal surges angrily, something he's not felt since Grutas laughed about the soup, told him how they'd fed him Mischa, precious Mischa. He lets it rise up, unfurling itself, roaring it's anger. How foolish this man is to think that he can take on Hannibal Lecter and win.

Hannibal knocks the knife aside, kicks his gun. Jack swings him around, and Hannibal would laugh if he had the breath to spare. That move leaves him plenty of time to use the momentum against him, kicking at him.

Behind them, Jack's Shepherd is howling in pain, Velia is shimmering bloodily. He cannot think about them. There is only this. Only Jack.

Jack who has picked him up, slammed him into the cabinets. He feels all the glass shattering, sticking into his back through his shirt. The pain is reassuring, though. He is alive and he is here. He will be triumphant. He will walk away from this stronger.

He channels his rage, grabbing a pan and slamming it into Jack's face. Jack is a beast, though. Hannibal hadn't counted on this man being so fit. He gets in a flurry of good punches, leaving Hannibal breathless. He moves quickly, putting space between them so that he can recover, get back in the game.

Velia's teeth are buried in the Shepherd's neck, and even through the dog's fur he can hear her screaming in pain as the dog buries it's own teeth into her underbelly.

He grabs a towel, whipping at Jack, using it to catch his hand. The refrigerator door cracks angrily into Jack's head, and the two tussle more.

Hannibal is going to win this. He will win this. He can scarcely believe it when Jack flips him over his head. It does not matter, though. Hannibal Lecter will not be defeated.

As Jack tries to choke him, he glances at the floor. All that glass, so beautiful once upon a time, shattered now. His breaths are getting harder to take in, and he's seized by an idea.

He lets himself go limp for a second, and as Jack readjusts, he grabs the shard and goes for his neck.

Jack drops him immediately, and as he tries to right himself, he hears Jack shuffling backward, into the pantry. The dog flings Velia across the room, limps toward Jack. As Jack reaches out, pulling it in, Hannibal lunges.

The door closes against his fingertips.

It is no trouble. He has the upperhand now. Jack is bleeding out through the throat wound, the daemon can barely move. Hannibal will be triumphant here.

He glances at Velia, uneasy on her feet, but on her feet. He nods at her, and turns to the door.

As he braces himself to hit it, he hears Alana.

"HANNIBAL!"

He had wondered how long she would put up with him avoiding her calls about Will Graham. He had thought to be gone by the time she came to confront him, though. Poor Alana. Such bad timing.

He grins at her, bloodied and ragged.

She starts to run, and as he walks after her, he calls out to her.

"Why, Alana. You really should have called first. It is unbearably rude to show up unannounced."

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That winter had been horrendous, colder than any they could remember. Mother and Father hadn't been worried, though, and hadn't let it interfere with their yearly holiday to the family's hunting lodge. That wicked wind had just meant that Father stoked the fire higher in the mornings before going out to see what he and Ieva could bring back for them, and that evenings were spent curled up together on the warm rugs in front of it. It had been a glorious time, right up until Mother and Father had decided to help those men who had gotten lost in the woods...

Velia remembers the way she'd shrunk quickly into that mouse form, letting Hannibal hide her away in his pocket so that they could slide out of the cabin without the men noticing. She remembers the way she'd hated it, wanted to rise up and lash out at them and rip them apart. The rage that had pulsed through her, leaving her trembling and a bit terrified of herself. When, years later, they tracked down the leader of those wretched men, she took a great delight in sinking her teeth into that weasel, feeling the way his life pulsed out of him and faded, and once again she trembled in that furious rage and wondered at this thing she had become.

Now, lying on the kitchen floor and not entirely sure she'll ever be able to rise again, she can't help but wonder how different things might be had they not gotten here as they did- had Father and Ieva not offered help, had Mother and Adomas not struggled, had Mischa and Nikolas been spared...

She blinks slowly, hesitant, worried that her eyes may not open again. But they do, and though they are slow, they track Hannibal as he stalks across the kitchen toward the pantry door, as beautiful in

his rage as he has ever been.

She can hear the phone within, Bella's voice concerned and disoriented. She can hear Jack panting, struggling to hold on for his wife. She can hear the shallow breaths that the shepherd is taking. She can hear them all dying, and she can't help the huff of amusement she lets out.

Foolish of them, to think they understood even in the slightest just what she and Hannibal were capable of...

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The rain is pounding down so hard that he can barely see the road. He's gripping the steering wheel too tightly, knuckles white around it. The roads are wet and he's going as fast as he dares, getting more and more worried as they get closer to Hannibal's.

"I don't like this," Brina whispers, her quiet voice barely breaking through the roar of the rain.

They pull to a stop behind the cars already in front of Hannibal's as she says it, and as he turns the car off, he takes a moment to gather himself. "I don't either."

"What's..." Brina starts, but trails off, not letting herself finish the question.

He's not sure what she intended to ask, but as he reaches for the handle, he answers anyway, "I don't know."

She nods, and they climb out. They're immediately soaked, the rain unforgiving as he pauses to look at Jack's car, to look at Alana's car. Brina's hurried away, not hanging back with him, and it's her yelp that pulls him away from the cars.

"Will! WILL!"

He rushes toward her, slipping only slightly on the slick ground but continuing on nevertheless. She's crouched over someone, over Alana. He drops down next to her, hands hovering in the air above her. He wants to check her pulse, but he's afraid to touch her. She's surrounded by glass. He doesn't even want to look up, can picture the window she must have come through perfectly without looking up for confirmation. It's not even a reconstruction helping him. He's just stood at it enough to know exactly where she had to have been.

"She's alive," Brina whispers, and he nods. He trusts her on this.

"I've got to..." he gestures for his cell phone, and they both know what this will mean. He's either got to leave Alana here to die, or he has to call for help and give Hannibal up in the process.

He can taste the terror in the back of his throat.

"I have to," he says, and she nods at him. She presses her nose lightly to Orione.

"You have to," she says, moving away from Orione and Alana.

When the operator answers, he jumps slightly, not having realized he'd even allowed himself to dial the phone. "This is Will Graham. I need ERT to 5 Chandel Square."

He can hear them asking questions, but he can't speak around the lump in his throat, so he hangs up, sliding the phone into his pocket. He doesn't want to leave Alana here alone, but he needs to go inside. He needs to see... Jack's still unaccounted for, Hannibal's still unaccounted for. He needs to go in. He needs to see... He needs to see what... He doesn't want to leave Alana here alone.

"Will!" Brina exclaims, and he jerks to attention. Alana's woken up, eyes fluttering weakly.

"Jack is inside," she whispers, voice hoarse and faint. He takes his jacket off, for all the good it will do her, covering her gently. She shakes her head, slightly, and whispers, "Go."

He doesn't know what to do for her, so he just nods. He stands up, pulling his gun out, and turns to the door. It's open. He knows he needs to go inside. He needs to check on Jack. He needs to check on Hannibal. He needs to see... the police are on their way. It won't take them long, he knows. They'll be here any moment, and he has to know what's in that house before they do. He has to know what's going on in there. He has to see... He has to go in, he has to figure this out, he has to see what's happened in there.

Brina leads the way, silent through the foyer. If he hadn't just been outside then he'd have no clue that anything was wrong.

He presses his eyes closed for a moment and lets himself pretend. He can hear Hannibal's music coming from the kitchen. He can see Hannibal, shirtsleeves rolled up, knife in hand, deftly slicing vegetables. He can taste the spices in the air, the wine Hannibal's been drinking as their lips press lightly together. He can feel Hannibal's smile against his own.

As he heads into the kitchen, his whole body seizes up, forcing him to a stop. There's blood on the floor outside of it. Brina whines. She's sniffing at it, but not saying anything, stepping gingerly into the kitchen. He forces himself to follow her as her tail disappears into the room.

She's beside Velia. Velia who is lying on the floor, leg splayed at an odd angle, but alert and pressing her face against Brina's. It takes him a second, a minute, an hour, to look away from them, to find Hannibal.

Hannibal's leaned against the pantry door, panting and furious and glorious in that rage. His shirt sleeves are up, and Will can't stop a panicked half laugh at it. He wonders for just a moment at what he might taste if he were to kiss Hannibal right now. It's short lived, though, as Hannibal's eyes meet his.

His shirt is bloodsoaked, and his knuckles give away the fight he's obviously been in. More than the knuckles, his face gives it away. His eye and lip are starting to swell, and there are trickles of blood.

Will doesn't ask, can't form any words, just sets his gun down and moves toward Hannibal. He presses himself against Hannibal, feels him relax the slightest bit against him.

"Will," Hannibal says, voice unsure in a way that sounds wrong for him. It makes Will feel out of place and dangerous.

Will steps back, making eye contact with him. He can feel his own fury rising up. He's suddenly livid over all of this. Over Alana, outside on the ground. Over Jack, wherever he may be. Over Hannibal, who couldn't just fucking talk to him and let him help fix things. He's mad about the

encephalitis all over again, mad about Mason, mad about all the petty arguments they've been having. He can barely see straight he's so angry that Hannibal has put him here in this position.

"Jack is-

"No. I don't. Shut up, Hannibal. I don't want to know. Don't tell me. Just. Don't say it."

Hannibal startles a little, eyebrow raising for a moment before his face settles into a deeply unimpressed expression.

"What happened here, Hannibal? How did all of this even happen?"

"Jack showed up. He wasn't in the mood to have a conversation, so I have to admit that I am not entirely sure what led to our... disagreement. I can guess, of course, but-

"Fucking bullshit, Hannibal. You could have. Fuck. I don't know. Why didn't you call me? Why didn't you just cooperate and call me or I don't even fucking-

"And what would you have done, Will? Saddled up your white horse and swooped in? Seen me arrested, or killed, or locked away in a cage, Will?"

"...I don't know what I would have done. But I would have done something, damn it."

Brina whines from Velia's side. He glances over and sees that Velia's eyes have drifted closed, her breathing is shallow. There's blood around her that he didn't notice before. Hannibal's hands have tightened into fists, knuckles white, his own breathing sped up just enough- on anyone else it wouldn't be noticeable, but for Hannibal it's quite a tell.

Will rakes his hand through his hair, then steps forward to let his hand rest on Hannibal's chest.

"You need to go, Hannibal. I called for help when I found Alana."

"You-

"No. You had to know I couldn't just leave her out there, dying in the rain. I called and they're on their way, Hannibal. You have to leave. You can't be here when they get here."

"And what will you do, Will?" Hannibal asks, voice soft.

Will sighs, turning away from Hannibal, facing the door and letting his mind wander over all the possible outcomes of this.

"I don't know, Hannibal."

Everything has been leading up to this, Will thinks, pressing a hand against the door frame.

The past weeks, the past year, the past decade. Maybe even his whole life.

He's spent every day of his life trying to convince himself he wasn't different. Or that he wasn't too different. Or that he could fit in if he tried hard enough. Or that he could at least hide how different he was even though he'd never fit in.

He can hear the sirens in the distance.

He thinks about Jack. He thinks about Alana. He thinks about Abigail. He thinks about Winston.

He thinks about Hannibal.

Hannibal is calm beside him, scrolling quietly through an article on his tablet. Brina is asleep at their feet, twined so closely together with Velia that he isn't sure he could tell them apart if he had to. He glances out the window, looking into the absolute darkness stretching in all directions.

He tries not to see the symbolism in that.

Somewhere in the world, Alana's in surgery. He still doesn't know what happened to Jack. It should probably bother him that he's more concerned about his dogs than he is about Jack.

It doesn't.

He tilts his head to listen as Hannibal speaks quietly with the flight attendant, but he doesn't look over until she's wandered away. He finds Hannibal looking at him, and all he can do is reach over and catch his hand. He almost wishes he hadn't looked at him; it almost overwhelms him. He's not sure he even knows the right words to capture the emotions written across Hannibal's face, and it takes his breath away.

He's not sure what's waiting for them at the other end of this, but it doesn't really matter.

This is where he's supposed to be.

Art by Kasumizuki

This absolutely lovely artwork was created by [Kasumizuki](#), on Tumblr.



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